

Popular preachers were exhorting the villeins to withdraw their services from their masters because of the wickedness of the upper classes. This plea of moral reprobation, which can be traced in the speeches and messages that fomented the Bising, was in accordance with the general tenor of Wycliffe's old theory. But, now that it had become a practical question, he denounced it unmistakably, together with any crude and levelling inferences from the notion of Christian brotherhood.

'The fiend/ he says, 'moveth some men to say that Christen men should not be servants or thralls to heathen lords, sith they ben false to G-od and less worthy than Christen men; neither to Christen lords, for they ben brethren in kind, and Jesu Christ bought Christen men on the Cross and made them free. But against this heresy Paul writeth in God's law.' 'But yet,' he goes on, '* some men that ben out of charity, slander Poor Priests with this error, that servants or tenants may lawfully withhold rents or services from their lords, when lords ben openly wicked in their living.'¹

But while Wycliffe thus made his position clear as to violent and illegal remedies, and did at least something to counteract any effect which his early academical speculations might have had on society, he was not afraid to avow his sympathy with the serfs' demand for freedom, and his anger at their oppression by the upper class:—

* Strifes, contests and debates ben used in our land, for lords striven with their tenants to bring them in thralldom more than they shoulde by reason and charity. Also lords many times do wrongs to poor men by extortions and unreasonable amercements and unreasonable taxes, and take poor men's goods and payen not therefore but with sticks (tallies), and despisen them and menace and sometime beat them when they ask their pay. And thus lords devour poor men's goods in gluttony and waste and pride, and they perish for mischief and hunger and thirst and cold, and their children also. And if their rent be not readily paid their beasts ben distressed, and they pursued without mercy, though they ben never so poor and needy.....And so in a manner they eat and drink poor

¹ Matt., 227-9 ; *De Sex Jugis*, Lechler, ii. 600-1.